

GIRLS: Cambodia 2019

All over the world girls are at a disadvantage as far as studying is concerned. This is not new. My own aunt was prohibited from taking p a full scholarship to Cambridge about 80 years ago!!! There are always plenty of reasons for keeping a girl home after puberty. A few I can think of are: it is dangerous (rape etc.); the family needs help with chores and siblings; money is limited so only the boys can be educated; it is not necessary as the girl will only stay at home to care for her future husband and children.

But it is fully and widely recognised that, according to Paul Hawken in *Drawdown 2017*:

“educated girls realise higher wages and greater upward mobility, contributing to economic growth. Their rates of maternal mortality drop, as do mortality rates of their babies. They are less likely to marry as children or against their will. They have lower incidence of HIV/AIDS and malaria—the “social vaccine” effect. Their agricultural plots are more productive and their families better nourished. They are more empowered at home, at work, and in society.”

The first thing that Lotus Outreach (LO) does is to give bikes to girls to keep them in school.

“Give” is actually not the case. The girls have to live at least 1.5 kms. from the school, sign to stay in school at least 2 years.



Getting ready



Got 'em



Learning maintenance



Off we go!

So, on a nice hot day we drove south of Phnom Penh to Takeo to give away 26 bikes to girls. We stuck the stickers (LO and the logo)

on the bikes and made sure each one had its repair kit, basket, pump, basket and light.



8 girls living space



Kitchen

Tertiary Education

LO has a special program for girls passing year 12 of school in Cambodia called CATALYST. They are given rice, basic support for food and

rent and even tuition fees, if they absolutely can't manage. Most of them work though, some even full time while studying in the evenings and at weekends.

They manage by living squeezed into the ever-rising cost of living tiny one room apartments and eat a lot of eggs. Carefully and faithfully monitored and supported by Raksmeay, the Country Coordinator, and Pisey, the Project Officer, they are even encouraged to also be involved in collecting tiny amounts of money from their classmates to extend a helping hand to others. They raised \$33 for emergency relief supplies after disaster in Siem Reap this year.

Yesterday I met up with 19 of the 44 who mostly study at Phnom Penh University. They are brave and determined to succeed. One girl got straight As but failed one subject because she was sick. Her powerful voice in explanation truly convinced me that, in spite of being sick, she would pass next time and never fail again!!!

I decided to interview the youngest and the oldest. Popounera Ren is 18 and in her final year



of studying physics!!! She is obviously an amazing girl to be so far ahead so young! Next she hopes to study Pedagogy and then become a teacher.

Sam Nang San is 34 and studying Arts, mainly English. Her story is incredible! She went to school until year 5, dropped out to help her family, started studying alone, asking help from friends, took a 6-month course just before the exam and passed. (She told me that she couldn't



believe she'd passed!) She works in quality control in a very nice company and hopes to join the sales team when she graduates this year. What courage (I couldn't do it!!)

So here they all are, having a drink together after the meeting:



But the boys are getting behind... For example, there are more girls in the police academy where Sokha Ken (one of our exCATALYST girls) is



studying than boys in her year. So??? What are we going to do?

All the best, mujin